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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of paternal availability on the son's development. It was hypothesized that the son of the more available father would have better problem-solving ability and a more masculine orientation than the son of the less available father. The subjects were 30 four-five year olds and their parents. A questionnaire was given to the parents, and each child was individually tested on three problem-solving tests. The families were divided into a high father-available group (N=16) and a low father-available group (N=14). Study findings suggest that high paternal availability is positively associated with the son's problem- solving ability, while maternal availability influences this relationship and the child's development. (Author/JLL)

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The Relation of Paternal Availability to Problem Solving and Sex-Role Orientation in the Young Boy

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The Relation of Paternal Availability to Problem Solving and Sex-Role Orientation in the Young Boy

Research emphasis has been on the effect of the father's absence in child development and investigation of the effect of the father who is present is sparse. Lynn's (1969) theory of sex-role identification relates paternal availability to the boy's cognitive and sex-role development, hypothesizing that the boy learns the masculine role by solving the problem of what composes the male role. A close relationship with his father aids the boy in solving this problem, resulting in both learning of the male role and acquisition of problem-solving skills.

Support for Lynn's hypothesis is provided by Biller's (1970) review of father absence studies. He concluded that father absent boys perform more poorly in school and have problems establishing an adequate masculine identity. Lower paternal availability may also similarly relate to such deficits. Blanchard and Biller (1971) found that the academic performance of a high father available group was very superior to the performance of father absent and low father available groups. However, Herzog and Sudia (1971) summarize contrary findings and argue that father absence and therefore presumably also father availability, in itself would not relate significantly

to poorer achievement, when relevant family and socioeconomic variables are controlled.

The present study attempted to control such relevant variables and to examine the effect of paternal availability on the son's development. The hypotheses were that the son of the more available father would have better problem-solving ability and a more masculine orientation than the son of the less available father.

The subjects were thirty 4-5 year old normal white, middle-class male children attending nursery school and their parents. All the fathers were employed and were the only adult males living in the home. The mothers were nonemployed and were the primary child caretakers.

A Parent-Questionnaire was given to the parents to obtain: each parent's self-estimated time interacting with the child on weekdays and weekends, and his/her estimate of equivalent time spent by the spouse; each parent's knowledge of the child's daily life, problems, development, and emotional adjustment; a score for each parent-pair to estimate the mother-father relationship in terms of communication, common interests, and agreement concerning the child; an estimate of the child's emotional adjustment based on the parent's responses. The questionnaire also included the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1963) to assess parental emotional stability, intraversion-extraver-

sion, and social desirability set.

Each child was tested individually on three problem-solving tests: Tests of Basic Experiences: Mathematics Test (Math TOBE), (Moss, 1970-1971), to test mathematics-oriented problem-solving ability; Tests of Basic Experience:Language Test (Language TOBE), which is similar to the Math TOBE but tests language-oriented problem solving-ability; and the Guilford Creativity Tests of Children; Making Objects, (Guilford, 1971), to test visual-figural problem-solving ability, adapted for use with preschool children. As well, the It Scale for Children was administered as a gender-orientation measure (Brown, 1956).

The 30 families were divided on the median split into a high father-available group (N= 16) averaging 20 hours of contact and a low father-available group (N = 14) averaging 11 hours, according to the father's self-estimate of hours per week interacting with the child. No significant differences were found between each father's self-estimate and the spouse's evaluation of her mate's time. The two groups of children were matched for Full-Scale, Verbal and Performance WPPSI IQ scores (Wechsler, 1949), age, sibling number and configuration, nursery school attendance, and emotional adjustment. The groups were also matched for parental Lie, Neuroticism, and Extraversion scores, age, education, maternal availability, parental

knowledge of the child, and father-mother relationship.

The data provided some support for the main hypotheses of the study. The high father-available group scored significantly better than the low father-available group on the Guilford problem-solving test, t (28) = -1.87, $p < .05$ (one-tailed). Math TOBE, Language TOBE, and It Scale differences failed to reach significance.

High father-available and low father-available subsamples were analyzed for correlations separately and together. The largest and most frequent significant correlations were found in the high father-available group between paternal availability on weekdays and the Math TOBE, r (14) = .72, $p < .001$, the Language TOBE, R (14) = .46, $p < .025$, the Guilford, r (14) = .51, $p < .025$; and the child's full-scale IQ, r (14) = .47, $p < .05$. For the whole sample, patterns of association were similar to those in the high group though reduced in size. It Scale scores and paternal availability associations were all positive for the high group and the total sample, but were not significant. In the low group, only paternal availability on weekdays related significantly, but negatively, to Math TOBE, r (12) = -.53, $p < .025$, and Language TOBE, r (12) = -.41, $p < .05$.

Mother-son significant correlations were few, but significant positive associations were found between maternal availability on weekends and the Guilford Test, particularly in the low group, r (12) = .53, $p < .05$. The mother's availability related negatively to the It Scale in the high father-available group, r (14) = -.45, $p < .05$, and to IQ in the low father-available group, r (12) = -.49, $p < .01$.

The positive links in the low group between the mother's time on weekends and the Guilford test suggest that the time spent by a middle-class mother can enhance the child's problem-solving ability, possibly by compensating for the lack of time spent by the father. The hypothesis that sex-role development of the son is connected with paternal availability was not supported, but the significant negative correlation between the mother's time and the son's It score may account for the failure of the It test group differences to reach significance and for contradictory results found in previous research on the effect of the father on the son's sex-role orientation. Perhaps the mother's involvement with the boy broadens his sex-role orientation and acts as a counterweight to the masculine development associated with paternal involvement, thus masking the impact of the father.

Apparently paradoxical effects were found for both mother and father in the low group. There, the relatively low father involvement appeared to set a scene in which more time spent by either parent sometimes was associated with the son's poorer intellectual performance. The increased parental involvement in the low group may have been in response to rather than a cause of the child's poorer intellectual performance. Perhaps this increased involvement was not of adequate quality or of sufficient duration to modify the boy's performance. For instance, in the low group the more available mother knew less about her son, r (12) = .58, $p < .025$.

The findings of this study suggest that high paternal availability is positively associated with the son's problem-solving ability, supporting Lynn's theory. Other factors, particularly maternal ones, influence the relation and the child's development, but contrary to Herzog and Sudia's conclusions, the relation between the child's intellectual functioning and the father's availability is maintained even when relevant variables are controlled.

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